CLAIMS

I claim:

1. A food packaging film for use in creating and stabilizing a desirable color on a viewing surface of a raw myoglobin-containing food product without deleteriously affecting the subsurface color of the food product, the film comprising:

a) a food contact layer capable of contacting the food product held within a package formed with the film; and

b) an effective amount of a nitrogen oxide -containing compound applied to the food contact layer and capable of interacting with the myoglobin-containing food product to produce the desirable color.

2. The packaging film of claim 1 wherein the food packaging film is a barrier to oxygen.

3. The packaging film of claim 1 wherein the nitrogen oxide -containing compound forms nitric oxide when contacted with the food product.

4. The packaging film of claim 3 wherein the nitrogen oxide -containing compound is a nitrite.

5. The packaging film of claim 4 wherein the nitrogen oxide -containing compound is a sodium nitrite.

6. The packaging film of claim 1 wherein the nitrogen oxide -containing compound is present in an amount sufficient to affect the viewable surface of the food product.

7. The packaging film of claim 6 wherein the nitrogen oxide -containing compound is applied to the surface of the food contact layer.

8. The packaging film of claim 6 wherein the nitrogen oxide -containing compound is incorporated into the food contact layer.

9. The packaging film of claim 1 further comprising at least one additional layer positioned on the food contact layer.

10. The packaging film of claim 9 wherein the food contact layer is an adhesive.

11. The packaging film of claim 10 wherein the at least one additional film layer is disposed on the food contact layer.

12. The food packaging film of claim 1 wherein the film is adapted to vacuum package the food item.

13. A food packaging container comprising:

a) a tray adapted to hold a food item therein; and

b) a film positioned over the tray to maintain the food item therein, the film including an effective amount of a nitrogen-containing compound and adapted to be in contact with the food item held within the tray.

14. The food packaging container of claim 13, wherein the film is used to vacuum package the food item in the tray and substantially eliminate the presence of oxygen between the film and the tray.

15. The food packaging container of claim 13 wherein the nitrogen-containing compound is applied to the tray.

16. A method of packaging a food item to prolong a desirable appearance for the food item, the method comprising the steps of:

a) providing a film including an oxide of nitrogen; and

b) contacting the film with the food item to form a package for the food item.

17. The method of claim 16 further comprising the step of evacuating oxygen from between the film and the food item after contacting the film with the food item.

18. The method of claim 17 further comprising the step of introducing other gases or mixture of gases between the film and the food item after evacuating the oxygen.

19. The method of claim 16 wherein the step of providing the film having the oxide of nitrogen comprises the steps of:

a) providing a packaging film; and

b) applying the oxide of nitrogen to the film.

20. The method of claim 19 wherein the step of applying the oxide of nitrogen to the film comprises permeating the film with the oxide of nitrogen.

21. The method of claim 19 wherein the step of applying the oxide of nitrogen to the film comprises applying the oxide of nitrogen to the film in an amount sufficient to affect the viewable surface of the food item.

22. The method of claim 18 wherein the step of applying the oxide of nitrogen to the film comprises applying the oxide of nitrogen to a contact surface of the film which contacts the food item.

23. The method of claim 16 further comprising the step of evacuating oxygen from between the film and the food item prior to contacting the film with the food item.

24. The method of claim 16 further comprising the step of treating the food item with the oxide of nitrogen prior to contacting the film with the food item.

25. A method for creating and stabilizing a desirable color in a food product, the method comprising the step of contacting a viewable surface of the food product with an effective amount of a nitrogen-containing compound.

26. The method of claim 25 wherein the step of contacting the viewable surface comprises releasing the nitrogen-containing compound into contact with the food product in a controlled manner.

27. A vacuum packaged meat comprising an uncooked meat product vacuum packaged in a multilayer polymeric film having a first oxygen barrier polymeric layer and a second surface layer containing an oxide of nitrogen, selected from a group consisting of sodium nitrite, sodium nitrate, potassium nitrite, potassium nitrate and blends thereof, in an amount sufficient to transfer between 0.0008 and 0.016 milligram per squire inch to the uncooked meat product within 96 hours.